

22. The commissioners adjudicated that, "So long as the village *bure ni sa* [the communal men's house] existed and the husband and wife lived in different houses, each under the surveillance of persons of their own sex, secret cohabitation was impracticable. It was made still less possible by the custom of young mothers of leaving their husband's house and going to live with their relations for a year after the birth of a child; but since the *bure* system has been abandoned, and an imitation of European life substituted for it, husband and wife no longer separate during the period of lactation, but rather give their parole to public opinion to preserve the abstinence prescribed by ancient custom. The health of the child is jealously watched by the other villagers for signs that the parents have failed in their duty" (1896, 146; *italics added*). The commissioners endorsed the practice with their own instrumental logic: given the lack of stamina of the Fijian mother, her poor nutrition, and the lack of breast milk substitutes, they perceived its benefits and satirized missionaries who saw the isolation of the nursing mother as "absurd and superstitious." But their instrumental recuperation of the practice was rendered difficult by the additional discovery that adulterous affairs by the new father could also cause *dabe*. Thus "in Namosi, where lactation was continued for three years, a man who had an intrigue with another woman" caused his child to sicken with *dabe*, or in local idiom, "alien thigh-locking" (*ibid.*). The commissioners ultimately concluded that "retrogression is now impossible" and that the only feasible remedy is the "use of milk from the lower animals" (p. 148)—a remedy that portended even more infant malnutrition and death.

23. This echoes the way in which women from Vanuatu and the Solomons who went as migrant laborers to Queensland in the late nineteenth century were alike sexualized and cast as prostitutes in indigenous and foreign accounts (see Jolly 1987).

From: *Gender in Amazonia and Melanesia: An Exploration of the Comparative Method*. Thomas Gregor and Donald Tuzin, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, pp. 207-220.

NINE

Worlds Overturned: Gender-Inflected Religious Movements in Melanesia and the Amazon

Michael F. Brown

Noting that gender colors "nearly every aspect of social life," Michael Brown focuses on the radical alterations in sexuality and gender that may accompany millennial movements. Using data from Amazonia and Melanesia, he examines what he calls "gender revolutions" in which religious change is accompanied by remarkable alterations in traditional relations between men and women. He finds that in both areas millennial religious movements reduced separation and distance between men and women and that they brought "an explicitly political quality to female assertiveness." "Millenarian movements," Brown tells us, "open political spaces into which women may insert themselves." Nonetheless, "although the movements produced at least a temporary elevation of women's prestige and symbolic power, they seem to have done little to ameliorate women's practical subordination to men."

Brown's chapter should be read in connection with Jolly's (Chapter 8), which also looks at the historical experience of Amazonian and Melanesian peoples and its impact on gender.

INTRODUCTION

Those who survey gender regimes in a range of societies are invariably struck by their ability to color nearly every aspect of social life. As other contributors to this volume have shown, societies bring to bear powerful forces—ranging from child-rearing norms and sexual codes to the hidden messages of myth and ritual—that replicate particular gender arrangements in each new generation. The multidimensionality and pervasiveness of gender regimes make them stubbornly resistant to change.

When these sturdy configurations do begin to stir, perhaps destabilized by changes in settlement patterns, labor relations, or demographic trends, they usually do so slowly. Occasionally, however, we are startled by examples of what would appear to be gender revolutions, dramatic shifts in belief and practice that take place with great rapidity, often within the context of cargo cults or fast-moving episodes of Christian conversion. Such cases are admittedly rare, and what we know about them may be clouded by poor records and colonialist assumptions. Nevertheless, their presence in the ethnographic

record is, to pilfer a metaphor from Raymond Chandler, as conspicuous as a tarantula on an angel food cake.

These cases have received less attention than one might expect, perhaps because they make scholars uneasy. By definition, religious movements, especially those of a millenarian cast, depart from established social norms, and they often appear chaotic to participants and observers alike. Because research on gender has primarily attempted to expose the unspoken rules and implicit assumptions of everyday practice, instances of radical disorder have seemed more distracting than heuristic. These movements are also likely to repudiate customary practices, thus confronting observers with a difficult quandary. On the one hand, we are inclined to applaud native assertions of agency in the face of external challenge; on the other, we mourn the loss of a particular heritage. When male religious authority collapses in the face of the emergence of female prophets working within a Christian idiom, for instance, should we be cheered that women have achieved a degree of religious equality or discouraged because men now feel lost and betrayed by their culture?

This dilemma is nowhere better illustrated than by A. F. C. Wallace's classic study of Iroquois revitalization, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* (1969). Wallace presents a compelling argument that by the late eighteenth century, the power of Seneca matrilineages became a source of social disunity as men made the painful transition from itinerant warriors and traders to settled farmers. The prophetic teachings of Ganioda'yo (b.1735?, d.1815), also known as Handsome Lake, condemned the influence that mothers had over their daughters and insisted on the centrality of marriage, preferably in a nuclear family headed by a man. Although the religion inspired by Handsome Lake helped the Seneca to meet the challenge of European control, survival came at the cost of women's power. Looking at Wallace's work after three decades of feminist research, one may be uncomfortable celebrating the Handsome Lake movement as an unqualified triumph of cultural adaptation.

Complicating matters further are divergent opinions about the best way to interpret millenarian beliefs and practices.¹ In the face of growing dissatisfaction with an approach that treats millenarian movements as disruptive "outbursts," scholars such as Nancy McDowell (1988) and Nancy Lutkehaus (1995b) make a case for rigorously de-exoticizing them. Melanesian cargo cults, they assert, should be understood within the context of a group's underlying theories of history and social change. As Lamont Lindstrom argues convincingly, however, the proposed normalization of millenarian movements creates problems of its own. "Thanks to anthropology," he writes, "Melanesians now are known to be cargo cultists even when they are not actively having a cargo cult. . . . Everything is now saturated with cargoism: Melanesian worldview is cargoism; Melanesian cognition is cargoism; Melanesian psychology is cargoism" (Lindstrom 1993, 62). The conclusion that millenarian movements represent an extreme application of everyday

understanding may contradict the experience of participants, often one of profound disorientation.

Equally problematic is the current tendency to link religious movements to colonialism while ignoring millenarian traditions that predate European contact. A small but growing body of evidence suggests that some Amazonian revitalization movements grafted colonial concerns onto an ancient tradition of religious renewal involving the periodic abandonment of existing social norms in favor of the utopian vision of powerful prophet-leaders.² Recognition that millenarian thought may have precontact roots does not diminish the value of studies that interpret crisis cults in light of colonial or postcolonial realities. It simply challenges the claim that such movements are a unique response to capitalism and to the aggressive expansion of Western social institutions.

Also undergoing revision is our understanding of religious conversion and the social dynamics of Christian missionary work. A one-dimensional and reflexively hostile view of missionaries is giving way to a more nuanced analytical approach that calls attention to differences in the conversion strategies of specific religious denominations and acknowledges the complex and creative ways that native peoples appropriate Christian ideology and institutions for their own purposes. Christian conversion sometimes creates new political spaces for individuals and groups within indigenous societies even as it opens the possibility of forging strategic alliances with transnational entities, thus countering the intrusive power of the state.³

For anyone interested in gender relations, then, millenarian movements and episodes of rapid religious conversion present an especially muddy field on which to play; sharply divided thinking about their origin and trajectory makes it difficult to use them as a platform for consideration of the cross-cutting (and equally vexed) subject of gender. Nevertheless, a few intrepid souls have ventured into this difficult terrain. A comparative study of Melanesian cargo movements undertaken by Friedrich Steinbauer (1979) reveals a small number of cases, amounting to about 4 percent of his total sample, in which female prophets rose to prominence, sometimes articulating the desire of women for a more influential role in religious activities. Steinbauer considers such movements "triumphal manifestations of the female element above the ancient antagonism of the sexes," leading to a situation in which "women have gained greater liberties even where no true women's movement developed" (p. 121). Writing at about the same time as Steinbauer, Lamont Lindstrom (1978) undertakes a comparison of three cargo movements with an eye toward assessing their impact on notions of "institutionalized sexual distance." Here Lindstrom refers to the complex of beliefs and practices that separate men and women by fostering fear of cross-gender pollution, the creation and reproduction of male solidarity through ritual secrecy, and the expression of outright hostility between the sexes. In each of the three movements, Lindstrom finds evidence

that sexual distance was significantly de-emphasized or diminished. Traditional male cult objects were destroyed, men and women began to sit together during meetings, taboos on intercourse were abolished, and women gained prominence as agents of proselytization.⁴

Lindstrom's explanation for these common features focuses less on gender per se than on the political realities of cargo movements. Drawing on the work of Peter Worsley and other scholars who see millenarian movements as mechanisms for the creation of regional alliances, he notes that local male solidarity stands in the way of effective proselytizing, especially when the movements originate among traditional enemies. Therefore, he argues, cargo cults focus on destroying the symbolic apparatus of local male solidarity as a necessary step in the creation of supratribal alliances. "Since local level male solidarity is symbolized and associated with fears of female pollution, with bachelor purification rites and with phallic symbolic objects," Lindstrom writes, "all these things must be denied in the cult" (1978, 51). Women come to the fore because their presence tends to dispel suspicion when proselytizing delegations arrive from the villages of traditional enemies. This pattern builds on traditional affinal relations, which are intensified at the expense of male consanguinity as a strategy to promote regional integration.

Amazonian cases comparable to the Melanesian ones analyzed by Lindstrom are exceedingly rare, and the available information tends to be sketchy. Nimuendajú (1952), for instance, mentions in passing that Tukuna millenarian prophets were sometimes adolescent girls. Various ethnographers (e.g., Butt 1960; Staats 1996) note that the so-called Alleluia religion of the Circum-Roraima area, probably the most important and durable nativistic movement in lowland South America, includes women among its founders and current leaders. But little more can be inferred from the information currently available.⁵

The recent appearance of several detailed studies of gender-inflected religious movements in Amazonia and Papua New Guinea makes it possible to revisit some of the questions first posed by Lindstrom. Under what circumstances do societies repudiate male religious control and raise women to positions of moral authority? Do these revolutions produce permanent changes in gender relations, or are they merely short-term perturbations? What, if anything, might they suggest about the links between religion and what Micaela di Leonardo (1991) has called the "political economy of gender"?

THREE CASES

Canela, Eastern Timbira, Brazil

William and Jean Crocker (W. Crocker 1990; Crocker and Crocker 1994) have documented a remarkable series of incidents that took place among the Gê-speaking Ramkokamekra, or Canela, people of interior northeastern Brazil. They commenced in January 1963, when the mantle of prophecy descended on a middle-aged woman named Khêê-khwèy, or Maria, while she worked in

her garden. Maria began the first of a series of conversations with her developing fetus, which identified itself as Dry Woman. Dry Woman informed Maria that Awkhêê (often spelled Auké), a key figure in the mythology of the Canela and other Eastern Timbira, would soon reappear to overturn the current world order. Joining forces with his sister Dry Woman, Awkhêê planned to banish Brazil's non-Indian population, the *civilizados*, to the forests and savannas. Indians, in contrast, would assume their rightful place as landowners, truck drivers, teachers, and airplane pilots.

Despite the modest role that women played in the regulation of traditional Canela religious life, Maria managed to convince male elders that the prophecy merited attention. She was allowed to travel to other Canela settlements to share Dry Woman's message. Maria quickly gathered around her a group of young supporters, whom she referred to as her "employees," committed to helping her organize the activities that would usher in the new millennium. These included incessant dancing in the style of Brazilian peasants and transfer of all money and valuables to Maria herself.

Maria's rapid ascent is startling in view of the complexity and durability of Eastern Timbira political institutions. At the time of European contact in the early eighteenth century, the Eastern Timbira lived in towns of a thousand residents or more. Leadership remains unusually formalized for post-Conquest Amazonia, with a male high chief and council of elders. Although descent and residence are organized around matrilineal principles, the society is cross-cut by several distinct moiety systems that recruit members according to age-set and name-set affiliations. Ritual sodalities and men's societies, the latter now somewhat attenuated in their importance, create additional links between adult men. Although William Crocker, the Canela's principal ethnographer, describes women as enjoying high status in this society, the most significant political and ritual offices were, and are, held by men. The virtual collapse of such finely tuned and elaborate social institutions in the face of the prophecies of Maria in 1963 was notable even if one takes into account the help that she received from the young men, most from high-status families, found among her "employees."

With single-minded determination, Maria set about dismantling the Canela's leadership structure. She and her followers first humiliated the principal chief by exposing his daughter's genitals during a public procession. They then appropriated a house and converted it into a place where villagers could pay homage to Dry Woman by kissing Maria's swelling abdomen each morning as she sat in state. Maria soon abandoned her husband in favor of a young man named Thunder, son of a high-status family. Their household grew to impressive proportions. Meanwhile, the Canela continued to dance and to divest themselves of material goods. As food supplies dwindled, young men began to rustle cattle from nearby ranches.

Maria's millenarian project nearly collapsed in mid-May, four months after it began, when she delivered a stillborn boy rather than the promised girl.

With Thunder's counsel, Maria announced that Awkhêê still intended to return provided that the Canela showed themselves sufficiently devout. Growing skepticism led her followers to institute punitive measures among apostate Canela, including the imposition of sequential sexual relations on men and women. Particularly significant was the punishment of men by forcing them to have intercourse with several women in the female-superior position.

Enraged by Indian cattle rustling and nervous about rumors of native unrest, local ranchers attacked Canela villages in early July. Five Indians and one rancher died in the fracas. The death toll among the Indians would have been much higher had not the Brazilian Indian Service and other concerned officials intervened and evacuated the Indians to a safe place. The Canela spent five years in exile before they were allowed to return to their homeland in 1968. Happily, their population and general morale have rebounded from the disorder of 1963. Maria resumed a life of relative obscurity in her community, and her prophecies are now little more than a fading memory for those who lived through the millenarian unrest that they unleashed.

The Canela movement represents a vivid example of what Marshall Sahlins (1985, 54–55) calls "mythopraxis," a social process that hews to a mythic template. Awkhêê, the mythical being whom Maria predicted would return with the birth of his sister, Dry Woman, was held responsible for the marked discrepancy in wealth between Indians and Brazilian settlers. What Awkhêê had ordained he could presumably reverse, and Maria led her followers to expect that he would magically transform palm-leaf bracelets into wristwatches. This theme of reversal was played out in other ways, including Maria's edict that apostate men were to be used sexually, apparently against their will, by multiple female partners, an obvious inversion of the traditional practice by which designated women served (in this case, consensually) as sexual partners for groups of men during key rituals. She also ordered followers to have sexual relations with persons in formerly prohibited categories of kin. As Manuela Carneiro da Cunha (1973, 32) observes in her analysis of the Canela millenarian movement, Gê-speakers associate incest with confusion and moments of sweeping change. Maria's encouragement of incest was part of an attempt to destroy existing institutions and thus promote a transfiguration of the world. The spectacle of a woman taking charge of religious activities in a society where this was not the norm, the invention of Dry Woman, a feminine counterpart to a male culture hero, the curious "rape" of dissident men ordered by Maria—all point to the symbolic salience of sex and gender in the Canela's efforts to institute dramatic change.

Ilahita, East Sepik, Papua New Guinea

Arguably the most detailed ethnographic study of the links between gender and millenarianism in Melanesia is Donald Tuzin's *The Cassowary's Revenge*:

The Life and Death of Masculinity in a New Guinea Society (1997). At the risk of bowdlerizing a complex work, I can summarize Tuzin's ethnography as follows. In 1984, the Arapesh-speaking people of Ilahita, a village in East Sepik Province, renounced the secret men's cult known as the Tambaran. At a Christian worship service, men revealed to the women of the congregation that the Tambaran was a fraud: spirits did not, as women had been told for generations, appear to the men during rituals. This revelation summarily destroyed the heart of the Tambaran, for if women knew its secrets, then it was no longer of any use to men, nor could it retain its power to guarantee collective prosperity. For Tuzin, a significant feature of this event was that it happened at all. If the majority of the village had already converted to Christianity, as seems to have been the case, why bother to destroy the Tambaran rather than let it quietly die of neglect?

The answer is that a series of increasingly apocalyptic visions by female prophets revealed that the community must undergo a collective cleansing if it were to participate in an imminent millenarian Event.⁶ Hence the need to destroy the Tambaran and for men to confess their past sins. Precisely because women had been excluded from the Tambaran's evil secrets, they were uniquely empowered to save Ilahita from divine punishment. Religion fell almost completely into the hands of women, while the spiritual authority of men, with all its social and political implications, was thoroughly discredited. Hence the reference to the "death of masculinity" in Tuzin's evocative subtitle.

Tuzin's study devotes considerable attention to the role of mythology in providing a symbolic template for women's assertions of superiority. In particular, he stresses the extent to which Arapesh myths, as well as the obsessive secrecy associated with the Tambaran cult, came to be regarded by both men and women as evidence that male domination was a sham and, by implication, that the hoax would eventually be unmasked and women restored to their natural ascendancy. Although elements of this mythical substrate are uniquely Arapesh, many other groups in Melanesia and Amazonia share the belief that men's ritual secrets, like masculinity itself, are inherently fragile and in need of constant revalidation.

Kaliai, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea

Andrew Lattas (1991, 1992a, 1992b) describes a series of contemporary cargo cults in interior Kaliai, West New Britain, that include ideological transformations similar to those reported by Tuzin for Ilahita, but with different social implications. Lattas's principal interest is the impact of colonial domination on the people of Kaliai. He argues that their experience of subordination has induced a profound existential crisis that plays itself out in ruminations on the theme of procreation, especially the apparently vast procreative powers of whites compared to what is perceived to be the diminishing fecundity of native

peoples, the latter expressed in generalized fear about "the subversion of morally ordered sexuality" (1991, 239) and the belief that everything in the native world, from human beings to taro corms, is becoming smaller. In a cult arising in the village of Metavala, creative modification of Bible stories has given rise to an ideology that repudiates the Tambaran and other elements of traditional religion focused on male fertility. Instead, woman is restored to her role as the primal generative force—and therefore as the ultimate source of cargo. Lattas quotes a woman who played an important role in the Metavala movement: "Food comes from women, from the ground. You, men, sing out for food, but we, women, food belongs to us, it comes from us, women. . . . She carries family. Cargo comes from women" (p. 243).⁷ As one might expect, women gravitate to the movement, sometimes over the objections of their husbands. Their dancing and singing, according to Lattas, "is seen to be the new 'law' that will usher in the new age of prosperity and equality" (p. 244).

Although the validation of women's sacredness and generative power among the people of interior Kaliai would seem to replicate the overthrow of the men's cult in Ilahita, the political effects have been quite different. Male cult leaders either claim to embody male and female qualities (Lattas 1992b, 41) or insist that, as was the case in a myth describing the male theft of the Tambaran from its original female owners, they have now gained control over the implements of cargo magic first discovered by women (Lattas 1991, 249). Women who aspire to leadership positions in the Kaliai cargo cults have been harassed, beaten, and even raped by men, leading Lattas to conclude that the movements "represent a new symbolic means of men appropriating women's reproductive powers so as to authorize their domination of women" (p. 248). However revolutionary the symbolic changes produced by the movement, it has not resulted in the advancement of women to positions of authority.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Lindstrom's hypothesis about the reduction of institutionalized distance between men and women offers a useful point of departure for a comparative assessment of these three cases, although it proves more instructive in the Melanesian context than the Amazonian one. As a result of the Ilahita and Metavala movements, women and men worship together. Indeed, most Melanesian religious movements, whether they be cargo cults or episodes of mass conversion to Christianity, seem to lessen the extreme gender segregation associated with traditional men's cults, and in some cases (see, e.g., Kale 1985, 47) sacred places to which women were formerly denied access are converted to ritual sites where men, women, and children are now welcome.

The Arapesh case documented by Tuzin suggests that the reduction of social and physical distance between men and women may be strongly linked to the collapse or repudiation of male cult secrecy. As Marilyn Strathern (1988)

and others have pointed out, secrecy allows one group to control meaning vis-à-vis another; in Strathern's words, it creates "collective privacy." Millenarian movements often have the effect of shifting the locus of secrecy from men's cults to the opaque world of Europeans and their apparently boundless wealth—in other words, to the secret of cargo. Among the Arapesh, this has created a situation in which women could gain the upper hand. In contrast, male cult leaders in Kaliai have succeeded in persuading their followers that they control the new secret of cargo. In both instances, the movement of mystery from the center of native society to its periphery has opened a political space for women, sometimes with a significant reduction of the distance that separates them from men. Still, it is worth noting the circular quality of the gender-distance hypothesis when applied to such cases. Tuzin says that the Tambaran functioned to maintain distance between men and women and to regulate relations between them. It is hardly surprising, then, that when the Tambaran collapsed, so did many traditional gender barriers. In this instance, cause and effect are indistinguishable.

The extreme gender separation characteristic of many Melanesian traditions is virtually unknown in Amazonia, although one finds examples of context-specific separation of men and women coupled with anxiety about cross-sex pollution. Even though Canela ceremonies are controlled by men, for example, they generally take place in full public view. Women serve as spectators and, to a more limited extent, as participants. The Canela express a concern with sexual pollution, and young men are urged to avoid sexual contacts until they have reached full physical development, yet the actual behavior of Canela adults is almost unimaginable from the perspective of Highland New Guinea. On major ritual occasions, for instance, several women are invited to make themselves available for formally sanctioned sequential sex with all members of a moiety or dance group to whom they are not related, leading to a situation in which a woman may have sex with as many as twenty men in a single encounter. Crocker and Crocker (1994, 143–171) insist that participation is voluntary for all concerned; it is not, in other words, a case of rape. Although recruitment to sequential sex is accomplished through steady psychological pressure, it eventually becomes voluntary and, as far as the ethnographers can determine, pleasurable for some women. It also brings important social rewards.⁸ Taking these remarkable ethnographic data at face value, one can reasonably infer that over the course of a lifetime Canela men and women will have sexual relations with many, perhaps most, fellow villagers of the opposite sex with whom intercourse is not specifically prohibited by incest taboos. Given this level of sexual intimacy, the concept of reduced gender distance sheds little light on the Canela religious movement of 1963.⁹

More illuminating is an analysis that integrates a range of ideological and social factors. First among these is the symbolic calculus of the millenarian imagination. If men were dominant in the old order, then the new order logically

calls for female equality or even superiority—in other words, an inversion of existing social arrangements. Among the Canela, this is readily apparent in the prophet Maria's promotion of incestuous sexuality and the "rape" of apostate men by women. Less extreme inversions are evident in the substitution of joint worship for the traditional pattern of male-dominated ritual in a highly gendered men's house.

One of the striking features of the Melanesian cases and, to a more limited extent, the Amazonian one is the degree to which they reveal an explicitly *political* quality to female assertiveness that is recognized as such by men. Among the Ilahta Arapesh, female prophets undertook a spiritual cleansing of the community based on visions that "revealed misconduct or breaches of faith and charged the perpetrators, who were nearly always men, to confess their crimes" (Tuzin 1997, 10). The Arapesh case is echoed by similar struggles elsewhere in Melanesia. Whitehouse (1995, 146–148; 187) notes that in the course of the Pomio Kivung movement among the Mali Baining of East New Britain, one woman agitated for an equal role of women in the presentation of temple offerings, expressing her hope that the cult would usher in a new millennium in which they would be equal to men. An influential female prophet in the same movement was forcibly silenced by male movement leaders, who branded her an upstart. Joan Kale (1985, 52), who analyzes a Christian-influenced movement among the Kyaka Enga in the 1970s, reports that women were the first to experience the trembling and trancing that initiated the movement, leading her to speculate that "perhaps subconsciously they saw their opportunity . . . to achieve some sort of status in the community."

Anthropologists observing such gender politics today are likely to look for their origin in the internal divisions fostered by colonialism. In both Melanesia and Amazonia there is much to recommend this approach. Changes in religious practices, settlement patterns, and networks of patronage have sometimes pushed women to the margins of public life in their communities, resulting in a loss of prestige and personal autonomy. But the reverse can occur as well. When men are forced to migrate to plantations or urban work-sites, the wives they leave behind may take on symbolic attributes once claimed by men—that is, as paragons of traditional communal values. In such circumstances, Marilyn Strathern observes, "it looks almost as though women now come to stand for 'society' itself" (1988, 77; see also Herdt and Poole 1982, 18–20). Similar processes are at work in the Amazon, where "tradition" has become increasingly feminized. In South America, women are less likely to be bilingual or to receive advanced education, so they become *de facto* repositories of traditional knowledge in their communities. This may enhance their moral authority and give rise to demands that religious activities include them as full partners.

Still, I would argue for a more balanced view of postcolonial gender relations and, by extension, for a less romantic vision of the precolonial situation.

Both Melanesian and Amazonian ethnographies provide evidence that even prior to full incorporation into global political and economic systems women could be critical of their collective status with respect to men and rather skeptical of male claims of moral superiority. In Melanesia, Ndumba women sing that "men are the enemy" (Hays and Hays 1982, 229). In Amazonia, Robert and Yolanda Murphy (1985) found that among the Mundurucú, women were surprisingly indifferent to male-dominated rituals: "It is as if they had investigated the secret sources of the men's power—and had found absolutely nothing" (p. 167). Such cracks in the foundations of reasonably pristine societies lend support to the claim of Gregor and Tuzin (Chapter 13) that men's cults in both regions are afflicted by a degree of moral ambivalence, a subversive awareness that the ascendancy of men over women is precarious and even artificial.

When belief in the efficacy of traditional religious practices becomes difficult to sustain in the face of cultural change, women's oppositional tendencies, once held in check by notions of spiritual complementarity, begin to express themselves more publicly. This is most obvious in the Arapesh case documented by Tuzin, but one can see it as well in the sexual punishments inflicted on dissident Canela men by the prophet Maria and her followers—punishments that can be read as an implicit critique of the sequential group sex for which women had traditionally been recruited. Millenarian movements and episodes of rapid conversion to Christianity open political spaces into which women may insert themselves, creating entirely new fields of influence.¹⁰

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

For all the detail offered by the three cases considered here, there are still many unanswered questions about the circumstances by which women suddenly move from background to foreground in public discourse about religion. Research in both regions emphasizes the importance of oratory, the mastery of which is typically the province of men, in assertions of political and religious power. How was it, then, that Maria convinced Canela leaders that her story of spiritual visitation was credible and in urgent need of retelling? What gifts of speech did she marshal to rally support? Or had the Canela entered into such a state of collective demoralization that traditional oratory was itself losing its power to inspire? Similar questions could be asked of the Melanesian material. We also know frustratingly little about women's specific contribution to the cauldron of ideas from which millenarian theologies emerge. To what extent, for example, did women consciously argue their own interests when they advanced alternative liturgies and theologies?

Ursula King, a prominent advocate of feminist approaches to religion, insists that religion "structures reality—all reality, including that of gender" (King 1995, 4). An appraisal of the three cases reviewed here, each of which

involved at least the temporary abandonment of male-dominated rituals and the ascent of female prophets to positions of prominence, suggests that King's claim may be overstated. Although the movements produced at least a temporary elevation of women's prestige and symbolic power, they seem to have done little to ameliorate women's practical subordination to men. Lattas's account of the Metavala movement in Kalai, for instance, suggests that it provided the pretext for further erosion of women's personal autonomy. Tuzin documents a similar shift among the Arapesh of Iahita, despite the moral ascendancy of women after the desecration of the Tambaran and its rituals. "The death of the Tambaran, and the corresponding loss of masculine legitimacy, has driven men more into the domestic sphere, where their authority is resented and resisted," Tuzin (1997, 55) observes. The result has been far higher levels of physical violence against women and far greater contentiousness in the village court. The Tambaran cultivated an ideology that must be considered misogynist, yet its hostility was directed toward women as a category rather than toward *specific* women. Furthermore, Tuzin argues, the sanctuary offered by the men's cult provided a safe outlet for everyday male frustrations, which were therefore less likely to spill over into ordinary domestic life. Turning to the Canela, we have less to work with because the violent interruption of the millenarian movement of 1963 makes it impossible to know whether Maria's prophecy and the social changes it spawned might have led to a permanent realignment of institutions and gender roles in her society. As far as can be determined, however, gender relations returned to the status quo ante when the Canela were able to reoccupy their ancestral lands in 1968. This contradiction between a rise in women's religious power and an increase in their relative subordination illustrates what Sherry Ortner (1990, 45) has called the "multiplicity of logics" that together define each society's gender regime.

As I write, a growing number of American men and women are exploring the links between gender and religion in an attempt to implement broad social change. Thousands of men have attended mass gatherings organized by a group called the Promise Keepers, a Christian fellowship dedicated to helping men "reclaim their manhood" by accepting responsibility for their actions as husbands and fathers (Wagenheim 1995). Meanwhile, women develop new feminist theologies offering an alternative to what they feel is the patriarchal core of the Judco-Christian tradition. Late in 1993, two thousand women gathered in Minneapolis, Minnesota, to explore the concept of Sophia, a female personification of the divine whose existence some feel is supported in biblical texts. The event caused a furor in the conservative wings of the Presbyterian and Methodist churches, which denounced the conference as an expression of goddess worship (Steinfels 1994). This controversy, with its self-conscious, polemical debates about orthodoxy and heterodoxy, democracy and "empowerment," is worlds away from the millenar-

ian turmoil of isolated villages in the developing world. Nevertheless, it reminds us that even in societies that afford women considerable freedom and multiple avenues of self-expression, religion continues to serve as an arena in which key gender representations are contested and, on rare occasions, radically transformed. Although accounts of such contestations in Melanesia and Amazonia remain sketchier than we would like, they have much to tell us about the complex processes by which women and men rethink tradition and renegotiate relations of dominance and subordination in times of change.

NOTES

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1. Space limitations lead me to sidestep the usual terminological wrangling about what is or isn't a "millenarian movement," a "cargo cult," and so on. For the purposes of this chapter, a millenarian or revitalization movement may be understood to mean a process of comprehensive social and cultural change defined by religious idioms, usually contrasting with prior social forms and practices in a self-conscious way. I am persuaded by the arguments of other contributors to this book that when considering Melanesian and Amazonian ethnography there is little point in making rigid distinctions between millenarian movements and dramatic instances of Christian conversion, many of which exhibit strong millenarian undercurrents.

2. The evidence for precontact cargoism in Melanesia is briefly reviewed in Lindstrom (1993, 65-66) and, for Amazonia, in Brown (1994) and Clastres (1995 [1975]).

3. See, for instance, the essays in Jolly and Macintyre (1989) for the Pacific and, for the Amazon and other parts of Latin America, Brown (1993), Garrard-Burnett and Stoll (1993), and Pollock (1993). Ortner (1990) presents a provocative analysis of the gender politics behind the overthrow of the Hawaiian *kapu* system in 1819.

4. The three movements compared in Lindstrom's essay arose among the western Dani in the mid-1950s, the Kamano and neighboring groups in the mid-1940s, and the Taro Enga, also in the 1940s. Other comparative studies of millenarian movements in Melanesia (e.g., Burridge 1960, 1969; Knauff 1978; Worsley 1968) have little to say about gender.

5. Some of the apparent disparity between Amazonia and Melanesia may be attributable to the nature of Amazonian colonization. Europeans used the region's great river system to penetrate the interior from the sixteenth century onward. Badly outnumbered and understandably nervous about native unrest, settlers made it a point to suppress quickly any movement that could be construed as rebellious or disruptive. Curt Nimuendajú reports that among the Tukuna, for instance, young men and women in seclusion were sometimes visited by spirits who inspired them to announce millenarian prophecies. Whenever the Tukuna gathered to see whether the prophecies were to be fulfilled, Nimuendajú declares, local Brazilian settlers would "with more or less brutality intervene to crush the movement"

(Nimuendajú 1952, 138). Relatively few such movements were allowed to develop long enough for their full ideological and institutional potential to be revealed.

Although similar repressive measures were routinely applied in Papua New Guinea, as an Amazonianist I am struck by the extent to which cargo cults were able to unfold before the colonial officials intervened. The discrepancy may reflect the relative isolation of interior New Guinea and the low probability that movements in such regions would pose an immediate threat to European settlers.

6. Biersack (1996b, 99) provides a vivid description of a similar purification movement among the Enga in the 1940s. In the course of ritual bathing, "males and menstruating women gathered together in the rivers and they looked at each other. 'The woman's blood flowed into the water; we forgot our ancestral knowledge [*mana*]; we looked at the woman's menstrual blood,' one man told me. Some claim that these men and women stood naked in the river yet experienced no shame."

7. Although Lattas asserts that Kaliai cargo cults validate the generative power of women, he also presents information that contradicts this. At one point, for instance, he notes that Christian missionary work has had the effect of undermining the traditional matrilineal moiety system, thus leading some men to speculate on whether human gestation and birth are simply "tricks" played to convince men of women's procreative power (1991, 232). Whether or not this contradiction can be completely resolved, Lattas's account demonstrates the power of religious movements to evoke gender-inflected political struggle.

8. In interesting ways, Crocker and Crocker's portrayal of the involvement of Canela women in sequential group sex parallels Herdt's (1981, 282) analysis of homosexual coercion among Sambia male initiates.

9. The Canela case may be extreme, but one can see echoes elsewhere in Brazil. The Mehinaku, for instance, exhibit social institutions often associated with the New Guinea Highlands (men's houses, sacred flutes, men's ritual secrets, and male anxiety about the threat of pollution through contact with women), yet Gregor (1985, 36) reports that adult men are carrying on an average of 4.4 sexual affairs at any one time. Extramarital relations are sufficiently widespread that the Mehinaku recognize joint paternity, an institution also found among the Canela and elsewhere in Amazonia. Such radical discrepancies between an ideology of sexual aversion and the reality of flamboyantly widespread extramarital sexuality raise interesting questions about the relationship between ideology and practice in Amazonian societies.

10. Feminist historians working with North American materials have documented several cases in which native women used new religious options offered by Christian sects to increase their sphere of influence in community life. For a comparative assessment of this literature, see Strong (1996). Specific case studies from North America include Devens (1992) and Shoemaker (1995).

TEN

Same-Sex and Cross-Sex Relations: Some Internal Comparisons

Marilyn Strathern

In this thought-provoking chapter, Marilyn Strathern explores "internal" comparisons involving relations of sex, gender, and generation. In particular, same-sex and cross-sex orientations change across the life span and, in accordance with other corporeal and symbolic bodies, and dependencies and predations, alternately enter into the cultural constitution of gender. These internal dynamics of sex and gender are in turn implicated in the continuities and discontinuities between generations, sometimes in ways that affect the course of culture history. Strathern uncovers these systemic properties by comparing ideas of body substance among the New Guinean Etoro and Hagener, among others, and by extending this comparison to the Peruvian Piro and certain groups in northwest Amazonia. The external, interregional comparison enables Strathern to identify structural similarities between the Piro and Etoro, in contrast with the Hagener. The result is a deeper understanding of all the terms—internal and external, conceptual and phenomenal—of comparison.

With its methodological focus on relationalities, Strathern's study bears comparison with those of Hugh-Jones (Chapter 11) and Conklin (Chapter 7), and with Descola's contrast between "homosubstitution" and "heterosubstitution" (Chapter 5), while its topical focus on body substance, attachment, separation, and loss are reminiscent of chapters by Bonnemère (2), Jolly (8), and also Conklin (7).

The sexes have different destinies, especially marked in the early years of marriage. A young man may leave home to find employment, perhaps returning from time to time, but expecting to travel over a wide area before eventually taking up residence at either his own place or his wife's. A young woman may stay with her parents, perhaps making visits to her husband's settlement to bear children there, lest misfortune be laid at the door of her own kin, while maintaining gardens and residence at her natal home. If later the two have a joint household, much will depend on the flow of goods between the spouses. Without the precise normative expectation "of both partners wanting to live with their own kin" or of the pressure implied in "the visiting and giving of food" to persuade people to shift residence, their accommodations could almost describe the Piro-speakers of the Bajo Urubamba River in Peruvian Amazonia (Gow 1991, 197, 221).